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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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PIONEER LIFE IN MINIATURE

An exhibition of objects connected with Pioneer Life in Ontario, represented in exact models on the scale of one inch to the foot, has been opened at the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology. These models are the work of J. McNeeley McCrea of Toronto, who has been making them since 1935. Mr. McCrea was himself born and brought up in Ontario, and is familiar with the old buildings of the Province and the types of furniture and farm equipment used by the early settlers. He intends to put his knowledge of the subject into a book to be called: "THE WOODEN AGE IN OLD ONTARIO," but he feels that the models can be used to give an understanding and appreciation of pioneer problems and the courage and ingenuity used in overcoming them. The range of models is very comprehensive and shows log and frame dwellings, a shoemaker's shop, a carpenter's hop, a school house, a sugar camp complete with equipment, innumerable objects used in farming and various trades, and even typical bridges and fences. Stump-pullers and stone-lifters are shown, a tiny spinning wheel that can spin wool, a horse-driven circular saw as used by the pioneer carpenter, and everything necessary to manufacture hand-made shingles.

Although it was not possible to include every variety of implement and equipment, representative types have been chosen, and it can be said that the exhibition contains an exact representation in miniature of almost everything needed in the way of tools and equipment by the early settlers, and may be considered as being a cross-section of Ontario pioneer life.

Model-making is a labour of love with Mr. McCrea, who has never yet sold a model, and wishes them to be used for educational purposes only, as a permanent memorial to the early days of Ontario.

AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS MEET AT MUSEUM

The general sessions of the 65th Annual Convention of the American Ornithologists' Union, one of the oldest scientific societies in North America, will be held at the Royal Ontario Museum, September 9, 10 and 11. Mr. L. L. Snyder, Curator of Birds in the Museum of Zoology, is chairman of the Local Committee making arrangements for the convention. This will be the fourth time Canada has had the honour to be chosen as the site of these annual get-togethers. Practically all the eminent bird men of this continent will attend this meeting where papers will be given on the most up-to-date ornithological discoveries, illustrated by the best photographs of birds that have been taken in black and white and in colour.

NATURE'S POLISHED GOLD

One finds many hard rocks that were given a splendid polish by the great glaciers that moved slowly over Canada during the last ice age but rarely does one see large pieces of native gold that were polished by these glaciers. The Royal Ontario Museum of Geology and Mineralogy has received from Dr. J. B. Tyrrell two fine polished and striated specimens of such gold from a quartz vein found in the Swayze district of Ontario.

MASTODON SKELETON UNEARTHED BY MUSEUM

Under the general direction of Dr. L. S. Russell, Director of the Royal Ontario Museum of Palaeontology, a party is unearthing the skeleton of an adult female Mastodon from a farm near Rodney, Ontario. This Rodney discovery offers an almost unique opportunity to excavate Mastodon remains that have not been disturbed to any extent by previous non-scientific digging.

The American Mastodon, an extinct member of the Elephant family that resembled in general features the living Elephants, was a characteristic animal of this continent during the Ice Age. There is some reason to believe that the Mastodon did not become extinct during that Age, but lingered on into Post-glacial time, some 30,000 years ago or less. It is hoped that the excavation at Rodney will produce evidence to determine the duration of Mastodon existence.

STARLINGS IN ONTARIO

Recent reports from Normandy, France, that there has been a "catastrophic" decline in the starling population there, commencing with a winter of exceptional severity in 1939-40, have created interest—and perhaps hope—among ornithologists in Canada. European starlings were introduced to North America as recently as 1890-91, says L. L. Snyder, Curator of Birds at the Royal Ontario Museum. On March 6th, 1890, eighty starlings were liberated in Central Park, New York City, and on April 25th, 1891, forty more. From these 120 birds originated all the millions of starlings which have spread rapidly throughout eastern North America and are constantly invading new territory. In Ontario they have been observed as far north as James and Hudson Bays, and there are records of their appearance in Manitoba and Alberta. In view of these reports from Normandy, ornithologists on this side of the Atlantic will be on the alert for possible changes in the population of the European starling here, radical enough to be observed.

BEAVER'S TREE-FELLING EQUIPMENT

Borrowing a beaver skull from the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology recently, a Toronto x-ray technician made several radiographs of it. He had read that by stop-watch timing, a beaver helping to construct a dam across a Canadian stream had cut through a branch, two inches in diameter, in precisely 50 seconds, and he wanted some light on that busy woodsman's cutting equipment. Radiographs revealed why the upper and lower incisor teeth of the big rodents are such efficient tools for the job. Semi-circular in setting and with a base line of two inches, the upper pair have an unshakable anchorage in the jaw, and the lowers are imbeded in the mandible for practically its entire length. In both instances these teeth have a keen, chisel-like cutting edge. These deeply anchored incisors wear down with the constant wood-cutting activities of the beaver but this loss is replaced by the continuous growth of the incisor teeth during the lifetime of the beaver. Why these animals have been called 'nation builders,' how they inspired much exploration in the early days of Canada, and other facts about the busy beavers are set forth in a striking exhibit at the Royal Ontario Museum.